

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 635****[I.D. 071504A]****Atlantic Highly Migratory Species;
Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Atlantic bluefin tuna retention limit adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS has determined that the Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) General category daily retention limit should be adjusted in order to allow for maximum utilization of the General category June through August time-period subquota. Therefore, NMFS increases the daily retention limit to two large medium or giant BFT through August 31, 2004. This action is being taken to provide increased opportunities to harvest the time-period General category quota.

DATES: Effective July 19, 2004 through August 31, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad McHale, 978-281-9260.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Regulations implemented under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) governing the harvest of BFT by persons and vessels subject to U.S. jurisdiction are found at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27 subdivides the U.S. BFT quota recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) among the various domestic fishing categories, and General category effort controls (including time-period subquotas and restricted fishing days (RFDs)) are specified annually under the procedures identified at 50 CFR 635.23(a) and 635.27(a). NMFS is in the process of establishing the 2004 annual BFT quota specifications. Consistent with the requirements of the fishery management plan and implementing regulations, it is anticipated that time period subquotas will be established for the General category at levels similar to past years.

Adjustment of Daily Retention Limit

Under § 635.23 (a)(4), NMFS may increase or decrease the General category daily retention limit of large

medium and giant BFT over a range from zero (on RFDs) to a maximum of three per vessel to allow for maximum utilization of the quota for BFT. Based on a review of dealer reports, daily landing trends, available quota, and the availability of BFT on the fishing grounds, NMFS has determined that an increase of the daily retention limit for the remainder of the June through August time-period is appropriate and necessary. Current catch rates in the General category amount to approximately 0.5 metric tons (mt) or two fish per day. Based on this current General category landings rate the June through August subquota will not be filled in the remaining fishing days prior to the end of August, thus resulting in an excessive quota rollover to the September time-period subquota. This data is similar to low landings rates at this time last year when it was also determined that the daily retention should be increased. Experience in prior years has shown that the retention limit increase had positive impacts on the fishery and favorable public response, if done expeditiously. Therefore, NMFS adjusts the General category daily retention limit through August 31 to two large medium or giant BFT per vessel.

The intent of this adjustment is to allow for maximum utilization by General category participants of the subquota for the June through August time-period (specified under 50 CFR 635.27(a)), to help achieve optimum yield in the General category fishery, to collect a broad range of data for stock monitoring purposes, and to be consistent with the objectives of the HMS FMP.

Closures or subsequent adjustments to the daily retention limit, if any, will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, owners/operators may call the Atlantic Tunas Information Line at (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9305 for updates on quota monitoring and retention limit adjustments.

Classification

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds that it is impracticable and contrary to the public interest to provide prior notice of, and an opportunity for public comment on, this action. Catch rates for the 2004 BFT season have been extremely low to date and at the current rate of landings it is not possible that the available quota will be harvested by August 31, 2004. NMFS has recently become aware of a slight increase of BFT available on the fishing grounds. This slight increase in abundance provides the potential to increase landings rates if General category participants are authorized to

harvest two BFT. Delay in increasing the retention limits would adversely affect those General category vessels that would otherwise have an opportunity to harvest more than one BFT per day and would further exacerbate the problem of excessive quota rollovers. Large amounts of unharvested quota may have negative social and economic impacts to U.S. fishermen that depend upon catching the available quota within the time periods designated in the HMS FMP. Therefore, the AA finds good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment. For all of the above reasons, and because this action relieves a restriction (i.e., allows the retention of more fish), there is also good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d) to waive the delay in effectiveness normally required for this action.

This action is being taken under 50 CFR 635.23(a)(4) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 15, 2004.

John H. Dunnigan,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 04-16578 Filed 7-16-04; 2:43 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 648**

[Docket No. 040112010-4114-02; I.D. 061004C]

**Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
Conservation and Management Act
Provisions; Fisheries of the
Northeastern United States; Northeast
(NE) Multispecies Fishery; Georges
Bank (GB) Cod Hook Sector (Sector)
Operations Plan**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notification of Approval of Sector Operations Plan and Allocation of GB Cod Total Allowable Catch (TAC).

SUMMARY: NMFS announces approval of an Operations Plan and Sector Contract titled "Georges Bank Cod Hook Sector Operations Plan and Agreement" (Sector Agreement), and the associated allocation of GB cod, consistent with regulations implementing Amendment 13 to the NE Multispecies Fishery

Management Plan (FMP). The intent is to allow regulated harvest of groundfish by the Sector, consistent with the objectives of the FMP.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Thomas Warren, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 281-9347, fax (978) 281-9135, e-mail Thomas.Warren@NOAA.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The final rule implementing Amendment 13 to the FMP authorized the allocation of up to 20 percent of the annual GB cod TAC to the GB Cod Hook Sector. NMFS provided interested parties an opportunity to comment on the proposed Sector Agreement through notification published in the **Federal Register** on June 21, 2004 (69 FR 34335); additional background and details of the Sector Agreement are contained in that notification and are not repeated here. One comment was received, which urged conservative fishery management, but which was not specifically directed to the proposed Sector Agreement.

After consideration of the proposed Sector Agreement and the comment received, NMFS has concluded that the Sector Agreement, which contains the Sector Contract and Operations Plan, is consistent with the goals of the FMP and other applicable law and is in compliance with the regulations governing the development and operation of a sector as specified under 50 CFR 648.87.

There are 58 members of the approved Sector. As specified in Amendment 13, the Sector's allocation of GB cod has been determined by dividing the sum of the total landings of GB cod by the Sector members for the fishing years 1996 through 2001 (when fishing with jigs, demersal longline, or handgear), by the sum of the total accumulated landings of GB cod harvested by all NE multispecies vessels for the same time period. Based on the landings history of the 58 Sector members, the approved Sector TAC of GB cod is 371 mt, which is 12.587 percent of the total GB cod TAC. Letters of Authorization will be issued to each member of the Sector exempting them, conditional upon their compliance with the Sector Agreement, from the GB cod possession restrictions and the requirements of the Gulf of Maine trip limit exemption program, limits on the number of hooks, and the GB Seasonal Closure Area, as specified in §§ 648.86(b), 648.80(a)(4)(v), and 648.81(g), respectively.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 15, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 04-16586 Filed 7-20-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031125292-4061-02; I.D. 071604A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2004 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific ocean perch in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 17, 2004, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-2778.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2004 TAC specified for Pacific ocean perch in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA is 2,520 metric tons (mt) as established by the 2004 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (69 FR 9261, February 27, 2004).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2004 TAC for Pacific ocean perch in the Western Regulatory Area will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 2,170 mt, and is setting

aside the remaining 350 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3) as such a requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of the directed fishery for Pacific ocean perch in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 16, 2004.

John H. Dunnigan,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 04-16581 Filed 7-16-04; 2:43 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031125292-4061-02; I.D. 071604B]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the West Yakutat District of the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.